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Pygmoids in the mountains.

Among this medley of small communities, each having contact only with its immediate neighbours, there are nevertheless certain broad distinctions to be drawn.

First among these is the definite racial distinction between the coastal peoples as a whole, including those inhabiting the northern plateau, all of whom share certain physical characteristics in common, and the small, almost pygmoid inhabitants of the mountainous interior of South Malekula who represent the last remnants of an earlier racial stock similar to that found also in the interior of certain other of the larger land-masses in the Western Pacific. Though some of these occasionally come down to the coast at South-West Bay and other spots, practically nothing is known about them.

"Mat-skirt" and "Fringe-skirt."

Among the remaining inhabitants of the island Deacon drew a broad distinction between what he termed the "mat-skirt" people and the "fringe-skirt" people, based on the different types of dress worn by the women.[1] The mat-skirt is a plaited strip made of split pandanus leaves worn round the buttocks with short lengths left unplaited at either end which, when worn, are gathered together in front. It is invariably dyed red, and often decorated with geometric patterns coloured a faint yellow on account of the turmeric bath in which the mats are soaked before applying the red dye, these being bound round a stick during the dyeing process in such a way as to form the desired pattern by preventing the red dye from reaching the parts so bound.[2] The fringe-skirt is, on the other hand, a short petticoat made of shredded banana leaves or numerous pieces of finely twisted string undyed and hanging loosely about the loins. The mat-skirt is worn, with one exception, by the women of all the coastal peoples, and of those inhabiting the northern and southern extremities of the island, among all of whom the men wear a penis-wrapper made of similar material. The fringe-skirt is worn by the women of one coastal district only, namely Mewun, immediately to the north of South-West Bay, and is also the characteristic female dress of those tribes inhabiting the interior of Central Malekula. These two types of dress correspond also with an important cultural distinction, the use of the mat-skirt being definitely correlated with the megalithic culture practised by all the mat-skirt people but not by the fringe-skirted inhabitants of the interior. While it is true that the inhabitants of Mewun already mentioned, whose women wear the fringe-skirt, also perform megalithic rites, these latter have only been adopted by them during recent years. The same also applies to the neighbouring island of Ambrim, where a similar state of

[1] Deacon, 4, pp. 702 ff.
[2] This process is technically known as "reserved dyeing."

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184 affairs exists, and where the megalithic ritual is also known to have been 291 introduced comparatively lately from Malekula.

"Mat-skirt": Four main cultural areas.

184 Confining ourselves now to the mat-skirt region, while Deacon mentions some fifteen cultural areas, each containing numerous sub-divisions speaking distinct dialects, he was nevertheless able to distinguish four main regions, each possessing certain outstanding characteristics not found in the others.[1] These are, with my own additions from the ritual point of view:

(*a*) The south coast from slightly north of Port Sandwich in the east right round to South-West Bay, including the Maskelyne Islands on the south-east and Tomman Island on the south-west. This region is best known for the practice of artificially elongating the head and of preserving the skull, which is then modelled with clay and fibre to resemble the dead man's face while yet alive, and mounted on a wooden effigy representing the body, which is then decorated with all the insignia acquired by the dead man during his lifetime and preserved in the men's Lodge. In this region comparatively little stonework is set up during the rites, this being confined to the erection of monoliths, some plain but some carved with representations of the human face, and of small stone circles surrounding some of the cycas palms and other small trees ritually planted. On the other hand, the number of ranks taken during the graded society ritual associated with these monuments is very high, amounting in some places to over thirty. The coastal inhabitants of this southern region formerly possessed large sea-going canoes, and those in the south-west believe in a group of mythological culture-heroes who in the district of Seniang are called Ambat and are there said to have had light skins and prominent noses, and after founding certain institutions to have sailed away. In the neighbouring district of Mewun, however, the corresponding Kabat, whose megalithic tomb is referred to later, is said to have had two sons who in turn procreated ten stones whose sons became the ancestors of the ten sub-clans in this village.[2]

(*b*) The northern head of the island, in which the dominating tribe is that of the Big Nambas, so called on account of the exceptionally large size of the penis-wrapper which the men wear.[3] This is the most homogeneous tribe of the whole island, and the only one having hereditary chiefs and among whom kava is drunk. The inhabitants live in large fortified villages in striking contrast to the much smaller villages in most

[1] Deacon, 4, p. 15.

[2] See p. 706 and Deacon, 4, pp. 630-2. There is a slight confusion in this account as to the actual number of stones, which may have been twelve, thus corresponding with the twelve brothers in Banks Islands mythology.

[3] See p. 481.

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within which is also the family cemetery in which old men of high rank are buried. No women born outside the village (which, owing to clan exogamy, includes all wives and mothers of clan members) are allowed inside this enclosure, and those born within it (that is to say, the lodge-members' sisters and daughters) are only allowed in when specially invited on some errand by one of the senior members, or on certain ritual occasions.

This organisation into lodges will be fully described in the chapter on Social Organisation. Enough has been said now to enable us to enter the village without trespassing where we are not wanted and to understand something of what is going on.

Dress.

As we go up from the beach we shall have the opportunity first of observing native dress. As may be seen in the photograph of Kowu beach (Plate I), young boys and young girls go completely naked. When they are about six or eight years old, the boys start wearing a plaited string belt of soft material around their waists. This belt will have at first only a single coil, but as they grow older the number of coils increases till the string belt assumes quite lengthy proportions and may be wound as many as six or seven times around the waist. At about the age of puberty the boys put on a new garment. This is a penis-wrapper made out of a banana leaf stripped longitudinally in half with the midrib removed but leaving enough of the central fibre to withstand a certain amount of wear. This leaf is wound round and round the penis spirally, in such a way that the windings continue beyond the glans. This continuation of the wrapper is then drawn up over the string belt and finally tucked in behind it from above. The penis is thus held vertically upwards parallel to the central line of the abdomen, with the testicles completely exposed to view. This is the ordinary dress of youths not yet initiated. On initiation, the banana-leaf wrapper, called *nu-mba-nu-mbs*, is retained as an under-garment, but is now covered by a ceremonial penis-wrapper (*na-avu*) consisting of a flat strip of material plaited by women from thin strips of pandanus-palm leaf, dyed red and ornamented with designs in the dull yellow colour left by immersion in the juice of turmeric leaves. Both ends of the wrapper are so constructed as to leave a fringe of the same material, slit very fine so as to form tassels. This wrapper is wound round the penis in the same way as the underlying banana-leaf wrapper, and the tassels similarly tucked over and behind the plaited string belt. Over the string belt and tassels is now wound a broad bark-board belt called *na-tuve*, about six inches wide, made of the inner bark of a special tree sometimes covered with coconut fibre, wound round in super-imposed coils, which cover the abdomen from above the navel to the groin. This is in turn held in place by a plaited belt called *ne-tuw*, also made by women and in

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Pelur, of Togh-vanu, wearing bark-board belt and penis-wrapper. He is singing a cannibal song while holding in his right hand the sacrificial wooden hatchet figured in Plate XXIV and Fig. 59

[facing p. 42]

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PLATE VI

1. Plaited penis-wrappers from East Malekula and Raga. (*Speiser*, 3, *Plate* 43, *Figs.* 11, 12, 13)

2. Money-mat (*mangau*). (*Speiser*, 3, *Plate* 75, *Fig.* 6)

3. Dancing-mat obtained from Oba (see p. 523). (*Speiser*, 3, *Plate* 74, *Fig.* 4)

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construction and design similar to the penis-wrapper, though rarely more than an inch wide and long enough to reach round the waist. The plaited belt is tied at the side and its tassels fall half-way down the thigh. This constitutes full adult male dress. On important ritual occasions the place of the bark-board belt is taken by a belt of similar dimensions made of a light brown, almost whitish fibre, the ends of which are laced together when in position on the body.[1]

The women's dress is simpler, consisting mainly of a narrow mat-skirt (made of similar material to the men's penis-wrappers and plaited belts and similarly dyed), ten to twelve inches broad, wrapped round the pudenda and buttocks. There are several types of these, used for every-day wear and ritual occasions.

The Oba *mal-mal*, a yet more finely woven mat worn by men apron-wise from the waist downwards, is not worn in the Small Islands save at the time of the return of youths from the pilgrimage which they undertake to that island for the sake of Initiation into Sex, described in Chapter XX.

Personal decorations.

As ornaments the women often wear long strings of pierced shell beads (*na-sum*) such as are used elsewhere in Melanesia as money, as well as small but very dainty bracelets made of turbo shell called *na-lel*. Young men as a rule go unadorned, but old men wear as bracelets the tusks of circle-tusker pigs[2] that they have sacrificed, filled in at the end with fibre, and often worn yellow with age. On ritual occasions, apart from the numerous ferns, leaves and feathers which men wear in their hair and tucked into their bark-board belts, the chief ornaments are the arm-badges (*na-mban*) worn by both sexes, but particularly by men, made of white and black beads, the former of sea-shell and the latter of coconut-shell, arranged in geometric designs.[3] On ordinary working days these are not worn. Even so, however, we can tell at a glance quite a lot about the personal history of each individual we meet. Leaves or feathers placed in the hair afford us, both from their species and from minute variations in their position on the head, information on quite a variety of subjects: in the case of a young man, whether, for instance, he has recently returned from his first visit to Oba, Raga or Ambrim, or whether or no he has succeeded in finding a lover after this expedition. Others may wear similar decorations slightly differently placed to in-

[1] Native terms used in Atchin will be given in a later volume. Nowadays, as a concession to white influence and because they genuinely seem to like it, some of the young men have adopted the fashion of wearing in addition white cotton or linen squares tied triangle-wise round the bottom of the bark-board belt in such a way that the apex of the triangle just covers the testicles. Leather belts are also frequently worn in place of the plaited and dyed tassel-belts.

[2] See pp. 243 ff.

[3] See Plate XX.

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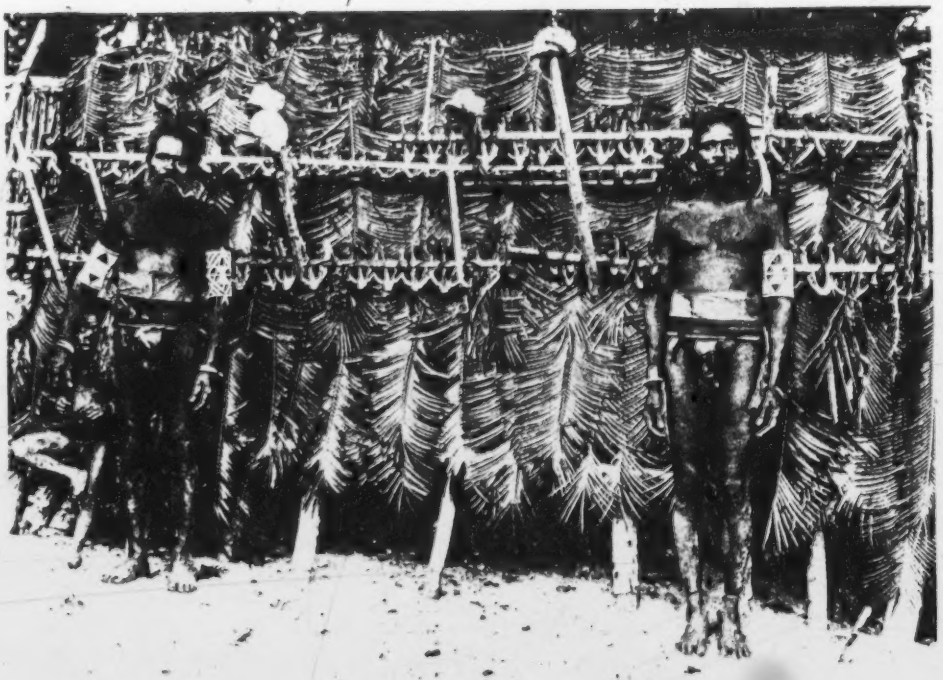

Racks displaying the tusked jaws of boars sacrificed at the consecration of a whaler at the village of Emil Parav-on Atchin. The two men are joint "owners" of the "canoe." Two of their arm badges bear the design called *uena*, seen also in Fig. 84

PLATE XX

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[facing p. 468]

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term "true circumcision." It will be seen from the description, however, that it is very different from the operation of circumcision as practised by the Jews and so introduced into Europe, and for this reason it is necessary to find for it a distinctive term. Owing to its close connexion with the simpler operation of incision, I therefore propose to coin a new term and refer to this operation in future as "circum-incision."

The main district in which this is carried out is that of the Big Nambas inhabiting the North Malekulan plateau.[1] A similar operation has been described by Tattevin as being performed by the Pornowol in South Raga, among whom, as among the Big Nambas, "the piece of skin that has been removed, as well as the stick and the bamboo knife used during the operation, are thrown into the water."[2]

Penis-wrapper concealing glans and penis only.

Throughout all those parts of the New Hebrides where either incision or circum-incision is performed there is found also a characteristic male dress, namely, the plaited penis-wrapper so distinctive of Malekula, Ambrim and South Raga in the Northern New Hebrides, and the island of Tanna in the south, and entirely absent from the remaining islands, where no such operation takes place. This remarkable garment—which, but for a string or bark-board belt, is the sole article of male clothing—consists of pandanus leaves stripped and plaited by the women so as to form a band which in the Small Islands may be some sixteen inches long by two or three inches wide, dyed red and furnished with tassels at either end. This is wound tightly round the base of the penis, and round and round again, the free end being then tucked under the string belt worn round the body immediately above the hips, the penis being thus held upwards in line with the belly. No effort whatever is made to clothe either the testicles or the root of the penis. The sole purpose of this method of dress is thus seen to be the concealment of one portion of the body only, namely, the mutilated foreskin and the glans penis which would otherwise be exposed.

Such scrupulous care is taken to conceal the exposed glans that not only will a man turn aside when micturating but he will even wear his penis-wrapper while bathing, removing it for his ablutions only when it is under water.

Penis-wrapper not due to fear of sorcery.

Among a people who have few other signs of sexual shame it is clearly important to discover if possible what motives should lead to this apparently excessively prudish behaviour. As part of his attempt to analyse Melanesian culture on lines of simple culture-contact, Rivers advanced

[1] Deacon, 4, p. 263.

[2] Tattevin, 1, 1926, p. 102, and Deacon, *loc. cit.*

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is, however, only part of the sacrifice, and indeed is paid as a rule not by the novice himself, who is but young and has as yet little or no property to dispose of, but by his kinsmen on his behalf. Pigs sacrificed can be replaced by others, but there is one sacrifice that cannot be retrieved, and that is the sacrifice performed on the novice's own body, namely, the incision or circum-incision itself. It is not easy to understand how Codrington, whose judgments are usually so accurate, could say that "circumcision" (which he uses indifferently to include incision) "is not a mark of initiation and has no religious or superstitious character,"[1] unless it was that most of his time was spent on islands where these rites are not practised or have been only recently introduced and so are valued chiefly for the prestige they confer. This statement is quite certainly not true of the main areas where the practice is carried out.[2] No native gives anything away for nothing, even to kinsmen, and in his dealings with ghostly powers the same principle holds no less good, though in this case the gain looked for is a spiritual one. On general grounds, therefore, I suggest, though I cannot prove, that the fundamental reason why the mutilated portion of the body should be so carefully concealed is due to the psychic power gained in return for the material sacrifice, a power centered in the mutilated part and so to be jealously guarded from view.

Penis-wrapper a sign of sacrifice and protection of the power located in the glans penis.

Thus in South Raga the "uncircumcised" are called *wah mal-mal*, "those who go naked."[3] This phrase may refer overtly to the fact that uncircum-incised boys, like male adults in the matrilineal dual organisation area further north, wear no clothes. But when we remember that the chief purpose of clothing among those who incise is to cover the glans penis exposed by the operation, we see that the expression "clothed" really implies the substitution of an artificial protection for the glans instead of a natural one, and that the penis-wrapper worn throughout Malekula is thus the sign of bodily sacrifice, and is itself designed to protect those wearing it from the loss of power so painfully

[1] Codrington, 3, p. 234. There are of course cases in the New Hebrides, as in Maewo, where the operation is not a tribal one but is undergone as a mark of social prestige. This is, however, only part of the New Hebridean fashion for "collecting" rites. In Vao and in the neighbouring Small Islands no man can marry unless he is incised, the reason given being that women do not enjoy intercourse with an unincised man, lacking as it is in the extra pleasure afforded by the free-hanging foreskin. In Tanna (Gray, quoted by Speiser, 3, p. 204) the operation is considered to make a man fruitful, a clear rationalisation from the spiritual to the physical sphere.

[2] Another misconception is to be found in Speiser's suggestion (3, p. 204) that incision is a prophylactic measure against phimosis. This is a twentieth-century rationalisation of a kind that Crawley calls "the fallacy of sanitary intention" (Crawley, vol. I, p. 170).

[3] Tattevin, 1, 1926, p. 402.

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acquired by those who are "clothed" but lacking in those who are unclothed.[1]

In this case, the concept of being "naked" is seen to be a spiritual one similar to the "nakedness" of Adam and Eve before they had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, by which they emerged from a state of undifferentiated nature and acquired the status of rational beings.

Unincised are "like women," i.e. undifferentiated.

So also, for instance, in the Small Islands the unincised youth is said to be "only a woman," by which is simply meant "undifferentiated," and only becomes a "man" when he is incised and made to suffer every kind of humiliation and is at the same time taught those esoteric secrets which, though in many cases apparently futile in themselves, bring him into direct contact with the ancestral ghosts and, by creating in him a new spiritual life unshared by women, make him into a full member of the tribe.[2]

In this way the act of incision, together with the accompanying initiation rites, achieves a triple result. In the first place, the undifferentiated youth becomes differentiated from nature by means of the sacrifice performed on his own body. This sacrifice in turn creates in him a new spiritual power having its seat in the glans penis. Thirdly, the glans penis, having through the operation lost its natural protection, must be provided with a new one. This artificial protection is the plaited penis-wrapper, which in the case of incision serves to cover up the exposed glans, while in the case of circum-incision it also actually replaces the lost foreskin, and it is possibly partly on account of this latter fact that the wrapper in use among the circum-incised Big Nambas is so much larger than that used by the coastal tribes, who are only incised.

Thus, while the wearing of a penis-wrapper is in one aspect a symbol of shame in so far as the mutilation or removal of the foreskin represents

[1] As evidence from further afield of the power thought to reside in the glans and the consequent necessity to conceal it, though in this case by somewhat different means, it is worth quoting a passage pointed out by Rivers himself to the author of *Male Infibulation* and included in that work, namely, that "Japanese wrestlers . . . are often accustomed to pull the prepuce as far over the glans as possible, then twisting the end they cover the whole with the scrotum, which is presumably tied up in some way in order to serve the purpose. This is done because a superstition is current amongst them that if the glans is uncovered bodily strength evaporates through that organ."—(E. J. Dingwall, 1, p. 92, quoting from B. Adachi, *Ueber den Penis der Japaner*.) It is interesting also to note that "amongst the native workers in the South African mines, Joest had noticed that during the examination held on the gold-fields, the circumcised natives took care to hide the glans, whereas the uncircumcised were not so particular." (Ibid. p. 98.)

[2] Compare the Kikuyu of East Africa, where an uncircumcised child is "not yet . . . considered a human being," and the Damaras, who "reckon a man's age from his circumcision, not counting the previous years at all" (Crawley, vol. II, p. 3.)

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a departure from nature and is thus liable to call down the wrath of nature on the mutilated person who presumes to trick her by means of an artificial substitute, in its cultural aspect it is a sign of manhood and of man's ability, through sacrifice, to conquer nature, expressed in the phrase that till a youth is incised he is "only a woman."

In a sense, therefore, the penis-wrapper may be regarded as a container in which the seat of power is enclosed. Thus, in the Small Islands, so long as the newly incised novice is still secluded during his thirty days' confinement within the Initiation Lodge, though his wound is often healed within ten days, there is still no need for him to wear a penis-wrapper since the Lodge itself is consecrated and itself wraps him round. But once the period of seclusion is over he must adopt it before re-entering the world so that on no account shall the power leave him.

Penis-wrapper the distinctive dress of all who incise or circum-incise. Term "Big Nambas" means "Big penis-wrapper."

In this way the penis-wrapper has come to be the distinctive dress of all those New Hebrides tribes who practise either incision or circum-incision. As I have said, the largest examples of this type of dress are the truly enormous ones worn by the Big Nambas who practise circum-incision and inhabit the North Malekulan plateau. Among them the tassels project sometimes as much as eight inches in front of the body and hang down considerably more. The word Nambas is simply a Europeanised form of the term used for penis-wrapper in some of the neighbouring Small Islands, as, for example, in Atchin where it is called *na-mbwes*.[1] The term Big Nambas now used by white men to designate these folk thus means "Big Penis-wrapper," and the term Nambas Culture is now used by some for the whole culture-complex of which the wearing of this type of garment is the most striking external sign.[2]

[1] *Na* is the indefinite article. The noun is *bwes*. Compare Wala *bwes-bwes*. The corresponding Vao word *nu-mba-nu-mbe*, however, refers only to an inferior type of penis-wrapper made out of a split banana leaf worn by boys before initiation and retained later as an under-garment beneath the plaited wrapper. The same word for banana-leaf wrapper is found in South Raga under the form *pin-pis* (see Tattevin, I, 1926, p. 403). Dr. Ivens points out the connexion of these words with the Solomon Islands *vusi, pusi*, "to cut," i.e. "circumcise." The Vao word for the plaited penis-wrapper is different (see p. 483).

[2] The scattered literature regarding mutilations of the genital organs has been summed up in the article on "Circumcision" in *Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. There also the "fallacy of sanitary intention" mentioned in the footnote to p. 479 of this volume is summarily disposed of, and the conclusion is drawn that among all peoples of the world, embracing about a seventh of the whole population, who practise such mutilations they in all cases have a sacrificial origin. The practice of circumcision is of course best known to us through its performance by the Jews, among whom it became adopted as a tribal mark when it came to be regarded as a token of the covenant between the people and Jahweh (Gen. xvii. 10). This was, however, a

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At the same time the commercial aspect of the rite has led to a yet further secularisation and in some cases to devices by means of which a rich man will pauperise his rivals with great gifts which he knows they can never repay.

FIG. 87

My informant Ma-taru, desiring to preserve a memento of me on my departure, chose to do so by measuring the length of my nose and scarifying a mark of equal length on his daughter's shoulder. He and his wife are here seen holding the dry strip of pandanus leaf with which the measurement was taken against their daughter's arm in order to mark out the correct length for the scarification. The wife's head-dress and loincloth are of trade "calico."

3: Harrisson N-5 (1934-1935) 1936
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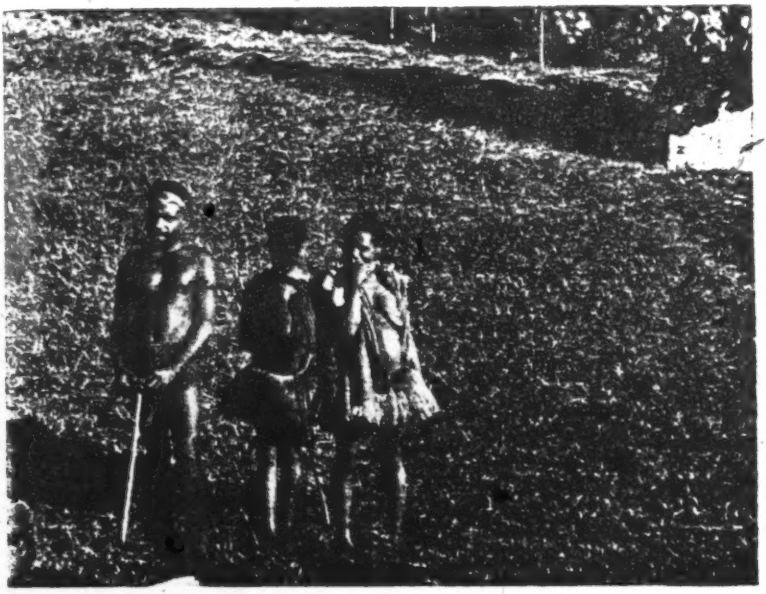
Pygmies
Nambas



Pygmoid people from central South Malekula

Middle Nambas of North Malekula

[facing p. 332]